Mr. Stephen S. Rosenfeld
The Washington Post
1150 15 St., NW
Washington, DC 20071

11/8/91

Dear Mr. Rosenfeld,

Your today's column, "The Gathering Momentum of Mideast Peace," is so troubling to me that I write despite the pain from cracked fingertips. So, please excuse the typing.

Conclusory statements are not out of place on the editorial and oped pages but that they are on these pages does not license departure from traditional American standards of accuracy and fairness and particularly from a staffer it should not license a total lack of factual support for an expression of opinion.

I find it deeply troubling that you and the Post could publish, particularly at a time of great delicacy in the matter, what is more like a propaganda piece in support of administration policy than of indepedent thinking. It reminded me of the journalistic failures and abdication of my very youthful reporting days, which were also the earliest days of the Hitler era, when the most respected papers, especially inside Germany, helped make that horror possible. I do not mean by this that you or the Post any more than some of our other papers and so many of Germany's wanted terrible things to ensue. They did not and you do not. But as they did not, you also do not see the potential of departure from traditional journalistic principles and concepts. Their's helped make the Holocaust possible. You and the Post do not see that another one is not impossible or that your expressions of opinion and policy might help make it more possible.

Basic in your piece and quite inaccurate is, "arabs,, especially Palestinians, had to arrive at the view that they had no choice but to accept Israel politically..." Some Palestinians seem to have, with no reason to believe they are a majority, and Egypt did, but your statement is untrue as applied anywhere else in the entire Muslim world, with the possible exception of Jordan. There has not been the arab acceptance of Israel politically you say there has been. More, when the PLO's national committee was confronted with the need to do this to gain U.S, recognition it refused to and later, when Arafat faced the same urgent need, he also refused to. First the administration and immediately the Post, said what is not true, that he had recognized the right of the State of Israel to live in peace within secure borders. You cannot produce any such statement from him. Period. He knows he could not survive it any more than Abdullah, Sadat and countles less important Arabs who considered peaceful coexistence with Israel survived it.

You compound this by describing those who assassinated Sadat as practising "anti- Israel terrorism." They were and they remain anti-Arab terrorists. The purpose of their terrorism was to influence Arab, not Israeli policy.

Your opening sentence refers to "an ostensibly insoluble thousand-year war" you say

is now "ripe for resolution." As though to underscore the invalidity of the last part, arab terrorists bombed the American University in Beirut apparently while the Post's presses were rolling. The first part just is not true.

The war between Jews and other Semitic peoples go back thousands of years, as do the more numerous wars between these other Semitic peoples. and until the Jews created the State of Israel, unless my recollection of history is not correct, the last previous war between Arabs and Jews was at the time of Mohammed's holocaust, much ~~than~~ more than a thousand years ago.

You then say of what is not yet really a peace "process" that recent changes "made it not only wise and unavoidable but also profitable and safe." You just say this. You offer no support for it.

It would be wise, but what change has there been to make it either profitable or safe? As it was not for Abdullah or Sadat or so many others or for the American University or so many who are killed daily. Have you any reason to believe that there will be fewer terrorists if there is finally a peace agreement and that they will be persuaded not to terrorize? Has not the mere halting beginning of what it is hoped might lead to a real peace triggered a marked increase in terrorism in opposition to it? Like this morning's self-destructive bombing reduces the opportunity of Arabs to get an education.

You say that because Israel is "the region's dominant military power," which can be true in comparison ~~with~~ with any one Arab state but is decidedly untrue when compared with the entire Muslim world of which all but Egypt is in a state of war with Israel, that "Israel could start accepting the risks of peace."

"What risks?" you ask and in answering your question you refer to only the Golan Heights and Syria. There are innumerable and great risks Israel faces, from the multitude of terrorists generously financed by the wealthier arab states including Mr. Bush's new ally, Saudi Arabia, to the greatly increased Muslim military potential.

Syria with its continued acqusition of missiles, of which all of Saddam's have not been located and destroyed, and its more powerful air force. The Saudis, who want the military equipment Bush intended to stockpile there, who has military planes that ~~could be~~ can bomb Southeastern Europe and just announced they want $4 billions worth more of fighter planes to add to their not inconsiderable force.

Israel is in fact a minor military power compared with the military might of all those who have persisted in preserving a state of war with it. More, you do not include the multitude of very real risks from those well-armed, well-financed and well-trained terrorist gangs.

Currently they are seeing to it that these new conditions you visualize as both safe and profitable are exactly the opposite, witness their terrorism over just talking and their other vigorous opposition to Arabs merely talking to Israelis. In addition to which both

Iran and Iraq, both having again called for a holy war against Israel, also threaten those who merely attended the Madrid conference. Iraq describes mere attendance as treason and calls for the assassination of the Arabs who were there. You call this "safe" and "profitable?"

Of Assad you say, "Fortunately, he is no longer in a position, as he was in Lebanon in the 1980s, to spoil a regional initiative." This, no doubt, is because he now has undisputed control over Lebanon! Except, of course, for the small strip above Israel, which it controls and thereby diminishes the raids from it, more of your "safe" conditions.

Of his "bargaining position" you say it "deteriorates nicely." Perhaps it is best that you do not undertake to explain this. You can't. It hasn't.

What would he bargain for? The return of the Golan Heights? If so, how has his position on that deteriorated?

The "moderate Palestinian partner desperate for real gains" you refer to is either the spokespeople at Madrid, who are themselves hardly the "partner," or the PLO, which is hardly moderate. But still again, do they -- can they- control all the many Palestinians who have been so violent, against Israel and against even talking to Israel? Of course not.

"Israel," you say, " can deal with Palestinian disorder - terrorism ..." Maybe so, but it has not been able to eliminate it for all these years and without eliminating it what Israel really has to deal with is its murderous consequences. This does not mean peace for Israel, it means war continued in a different form, perhaps intensified if all the many Arabs in opposition want that.

From what you say about the settlements you apparently have not followed that matter. Increasing the settlements has followed each and every move Shamir considers pressure on Israel. There are few ways he can respond. Whether this pressure was from the U.S. or from Arabs, it was followed by more settlements.

Referring to these settlements, you use the word "concessions" from Arabs twice. I do not know of a single one that you can be referring to as "initial Palestinian concessions" or as "further Arab concessions."

What world do you live in when you conclude that from the process started, with more concessions from Israel, it "can be as one integrated with the life of its Arab neighbors." With Iraq? Syria as long as Assad lives? Libya, not all that far away? Iran, which is not Arab but wants Israel wiped out? The wealthier states that finance the others and the terrorists?

But even if the states signed a peace agreement while secretly wanting Israel to disappear, what one of them has ever made any real effort to deny their land as bases for the terrorists, to block their murderous activities? To confiscate their weapons that have been and again can be so devastating when they have operated at the borders where Israel

is only nine miles wide? Much of Israel would be within range of their artillery - what they have, not what they can still get with the wealth they have accumulated from the wealthy arab states that have additional reason for now wanting any democratic state in their area of the world.

Moreover, because with the limited exception of Egypt, because these are all authoritarian regimes, Israel has to wonder whether any signature on any agreement will be rejected with any change in control.

There is nothing in your piece that is real or relates to realities.

The reality is that none of the Muslim world wants an Israel at peace and within secure borders. It took enormous pressure from Bush and Baker even to get them to attend this preliminary conference, and there is reason to believe that Syria got paid off not to wreck it at conception.

The reality is that Israel is a small and very vulnerable state.

The reality is that it is surrounded by enemies all of whom save Egypt persist in a state of war with it despite their losing all those wars, something I believe is unprecedented in history.

The reality is that most of the world's Muslim population also does not want the state of Israel to exist, for sincerely-held religious reasons.

The reality is that nobody has been able to end terrorism after more than four decades during which the Muslim states did much to facilitate it and nothing significant to end it.

This is what you refer to as "conditions" that are "profitable and safe" for Israel.

I am surprised and disappointed that you could put this article on paper, put your name to it and with it your reputation, and that the Post would then publish it.

It has no contact with the region's grim realities and it has not a word about how if there is an agreement it will enable Israel to live in peace and within secure borders, what even the anti-Israel UN regarded as its most urgent need and said so in those two resolutions only parts of which are remembered in the anti-Israel campaign of most of the world and most of our influential papers, the Post in particular because it gives information to the most important in our executive and legislative branches.

I shudder to think of what you have just done to the many under-informed legislators who depend on the Post for what they know and then legislate on it.

If the 11/9/91 Post carried a story on the devastating American University bombing in which there were casualties and buildings were destroyed I missed it. How can there be real peace with those capable of such crimes?

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

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